



WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code, and is defined as “a course of comment or conduct based on an individual’s sex or gender that is known, or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.” That means:

A person is experiencing unwanted sexually suggestive comments or actions.

The person making the comments or conduct knows, or should know, that the person who experiences them may find the comments or conduct unwelcome.

Sexual harassment falls on the continuum of sexual violence. Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organization as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”.

While sexual harassment usually involves repeated actions or statements, one incident can be serious enough and may be considered harassment under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

A person does not have to verbally object to sexual harassment for it to be harassment.

EXAMPLES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Unwanted sexual or sexually suggestive comments including jokes and name-calling
- Unwanted or unnecessary touching or physical contact
- Making gestures or touching oneself suggestively in front of others
- Staring
- Stalking/Cyberstalking
- Bragging about sexual prowess
- Using social media or texting to post pornography, images, words etc.
- Spreading sexual rumours
- Demanding dates or hugs
- Making threats
- Using derogatory or insulting language about a person’s gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.

Sexual Harassment can:

Happen in any space, including the classroom, public areas, workplace and “virtual” space such as the internet.

Be experienced or perpetrated by any person - regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, position of power and/or other defining characteristics.

There are groups who are more vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment including young people, people with disabilities, and women. Furthermore, women who are trans, racialized, Aboriginal, or marginalized in other ways experience higher rates of harassment and violence.

YORK’S POLICY ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Both the Ontario Human Rights Code and York University policy are explicit that sexual harassment includes harassment based on gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

This policy applies to York University community members including but not limited to students, staff, administrators, faculty, librarians, members of the Board of Governors and Senate, adjunct and visiting faculty, postdoctoral fellows, volunteers, contractors, and invited guests.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU ARE EXPERINCING SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Managers and other administrative staff and faculty have a responsibility to intervene and act on complaints of harassment. Please contact REI for guidance on appropriate steps to deal with a sexual harassment complaint or investigation.

When experiencing harassment, you may be in a vulnerable situation and afraid to speak out or remain silent for fear of reprisal. You do not have to verbally object to an act of harassment for it to be considered harassment. These situations are still sexual harassment and contravene the Ontario Human Rights Code and York University Policy. If you or someone you know is being harassed and you are able to do so safely:

Ask the person to stop their comments or behaviour. Ask a person in a position of authority (such as a professor, a supervisor, a course director, or a manager) to step in and stop the comments or behaviour from happening.





If the harassment continues or is not being dealt with appropriately, or you are uncomfortable approaching someone in a position of authority, call the Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion (CHREI) for free and confidential information and guidance.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE DISCLOSES THAT THEY ARE BEING SEXUALLY HARASSED

- Believe the person and take them seriously
- Ask what resources or supports they might need
- Maintain the confidentiality of the person disclosing the information
- If the situation requires the involvement of Security Services or a senior administrator, the person who has disclosed should be informed
- Refer to links and resources in this brochure for support

The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education offers training and support services.

Visit their website at:
<https://thecentre.yorku.ca/>

How to respond to a disclosure:
<https://thecentre.yorku.ca/how-to-respond-to-a-disclosure/>

You can contact the Centre at 416-736-5211
thecentre@yorku.ca

LINKS TO YORK RESOURCES

For more information on inclusive language, contact the Centre for Human Rights.

YorkU Human Rights Policy
<https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/human-rights-policy-and-procedures/>

Policy on Sexual Violence
<https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/sexual-violence-policy-on/>

YU DEDI Strategy
<https://www.yorku.ca/dedi-strategy/>

YU DEDI Toolkit
<https://www.yorku.ca/dedi-strategy/toolkitdev/>

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Ontario Human Rights Commission
<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/sexual-harassment-employment-fact-sheet>

A Guide for workers, supervisors and employers
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/understand-law-workplace-violence-and-harassment>

York University's Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion (CHREI) promotes and builds a respectful, equitable, diverse, and inclusive university community. We strive to be a leader in providing accessible, impartial, non-adversarial, and confidential programs and services that uphold human rights, facilitate equitable access to opportunities, and champion diversity and inclusion.

REI provides free services to current York students, faculty, and staff. To consult our team, call, leave us a message or e-mail us. Leave your name, email, and/or phone number and we will respond within 3 business days.

CONTACT US:

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUITY & INCLUSION (CHREI)

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